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The American Indian As Hunter



Pennsylvania Historical
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The American Indian as Hunter

By
John Witthoft

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission
Harrisburg, 1967

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The American Indian as Hunter

PART I. THE WHITE MAN AND THE INDIAN

THE FIRST immigrants to America encountered a race of people whose ideas and manner of life were so markedly different from their own that there could be little ground for understanding between them. European and Indian differed, for instance, in their attitudes toward the vital resources of nature—land for farming, places for habitation, firewood and lumber, game, and fish—and they differed in the way they used them. To the Indian, the land and its produce were not subject to individual ownership and control. These resources were, rather, part of a domain controlled by beings who were, in a sense, supernatural. The Indian succeeded as a hunter or a farmer, he believed, through the favor of these supernatural beings or deities; without their favor he would starve. The European settler sought the property rights to natural resources in order to exploit and transform them. The Indian, instead, regarded nature and himself as one. So long as he kept his proper place in the scheme of things, the supernaturals who controlled his natural environment would aid and protect him.

The differences between Indian and European in their attitudes toward land and game were no greater than other differences between these people, and can probably be understood in terms of social and economic backgrounds. Europeans had lived where every foot of ground had been used and modified, with every object and every clod of earth clearly identified as someone's property—all game animals from the king's deer to the lowly hare included—and with protection of ownership guaranteed by the gallows. In many parts of Europe, by 1700, the common man lived in a world completely owned by other people, and had no rights to firewood, game, recreation areas, or farmland. Given this background, we can understand why our forefathers tried to use the resources of the New World for their own ends, just as the "owners" and nobility had in Europe, and why they

This booklet is an edited version of a series of three articles, "The American Indian—Hunter," by John Witthoft, published in 1953 in *Pennsylvania Game News* and reprinted as *The American Indian As Hunter* ("Reprints in Anthropology [from the] Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission," No. 6).

tried to prevent individuals from monopolizing these resources. Every man could be a lord, but not a lord over propertyless peasants. These principles which they developed became and still are operative in many areas of American life, the most important of which are outside of our discussion here; these principles also have significance in the history of hunting and sport in America and in the development of our game laws. They explain basic differences between Indian and white hunting.

INDIAN AND WHITE HUNTING

American hunting and field sports have developed some interesting features reflecting their historical background. Several of these features merit discussion because they are so unlike Indian practices. The average settler had little experience as a hunter, unless he was from one of the smaller groups of settlers from the Scottish Highlands or the German forest area. Even then, unless he had poached at great personal risk, he had little background in the art of hunting alone to stock his own larder. Whatever his place of origin, hunting had been a sport of the upper class rather than a significant source of food. What game there was had survived, in populated areas, only because it was protected, often on land that might better have been farmed. Thus in Europe hunting was a sport, a luxury of the noble and wealthy, and a mark of prestige and caste. It had probably been so since pre-Roman times. The workingman who ate a rabbit, a grouse, or a deer had killed it by stealth, at the risk of his neck, and probably out of dire need. It was something stolen and taken by force, not granted from the bounty of nature. Finally, the common man had little knowledge of firearms and other hunting tools. Guns were expensive and their ownership was generally forbidden. There were no militia or citizens' military units. Gunsmiths dealt almost exclusively with governments and wealthy sportsmen. The enlisted soldier used a gun very different from the hunter's sporting arm; the soldier's was a heavy, clumsy, inaccurate, though nearly foolproof musket that required little attention.

Having migrated from countries where the nobility, the authorities, and the hired soldiery were armed and the citizenry was not, the American made a point of keeping a gun, and in most colonies other than Pennsylvania he organized militia groups. The European peasant-soldier could only be trusted with a military musket; the American civilian-soldier undertook to care for and understand the precision

tool of the sportsman, an individually crafted rifled gun. The European sportsman made hunting a social affair, with elaborate drives, blinds, and decoys; the American hunter preferred the individualistic ways of the poacher—still-hunting and ranging alone. Hunting had been a prerogative of the privileged in Europe, and in America it kept some of its feudal prestige: hunting became a cherished right of the free man. Even today, American hunting as a sport carries many signs of its feudal origin as a pastime of the lord of the manor. In the beginning, game was to the colonists a startling new economic resource which belonged only to the taker. Hunting had been a mark of prestige; here was a nobleman's privilege open to anyone. The practices of our sportsman today represent a survival of feudal aristocratic tradition rather than of primitive economic activity. Indian hunting, as known to us from colonial and later times, represents something very different.

THE HUNTSMAN AND THE FARMER IN INDIAN CULTURE

Hunting was an arduous and time-consuming activity of Indian men and was not in any sense considered a sport. According to our folklore, the Indian women did the work, especially the gardening, while the men fooled away their time on hunting and warfare. This is at best a half-truth, for this division of labor between the sexes involved equal responsibility and hard labor for both. Women farmed, not because they were made to, but because they, and not the men, owned the farmland and its produce. Farming had been invented by women, not by men, and agriculture remained the women's responsibility. Among primitive non-farming peoples, such as the Australian aborigines, women are not physically fitted for hunting, and so they gather wild vegetable foods to supplement animal foods taken by the men. At a similar stage in the dim Indian past, women, presumably, discovered that they could plant and cultivate some of the wild seed they had gathered. This discovery revolutionized Indian life throughout most of the Americas. Because women had been the first farmers, and because they were as capable of gardening as men could be, they monopolized this important part of the economy.

In earlier times when the family depended upon the hunter for food, woman's role, because she was a gatherer, was secondary. As farming developed, however, hunting became less important; agriculture made larger populations and town life possible, and there were now too many people on the land for them to feed themselves on wild game.



Smithsonian Office of Anthropology,
Bureau of American Ethnology Collection

The earliest known portrait, 1585, of an eastern Indian hunter was painted in water color by John White on what is now the North Carolina coast. In the upper left corner is written this explanation: "The manner of their attire and painting themselves when they goe to their generall huntings, or at theire Solemne feasts." White's American paintings are in the British Museum.

Farming remained a woman's monopoly, and women completely controlled the major food resources of the community. In light of this, we can readily understand the well-known fact (astounding to our patriarchal ancestors) that Indian women were dominant and self-sufficient and men subsidiary and dependent. Far from being an oppressed field hand, the Indian woman was a matriarch who owned her own house and fields, controlled the food supplies of the household, and held greater authority than any man within the family and community. Within her sphere, the man was of secondary importance and was apt to be dominated by women on any important matter.

Mother Earth and the Corn Mother were female supernaturals who controlled the fertility of the garden; they were women's deities, and the natural forces which they controlled could only be exploited by women. As in most other parts of the world, woman's status and importance reflected in part her economic importance to the society in which she lived; where women are not economically productive and where they are regarded primarily as ornaments, they quickly descend to the status of slaves; where they play major roles in food production and contribute proportionately to their society, their status and privileges can surpass those of men.

The Indian woman—regarded in native ideology as mother and gardener—was the central and most important member of the household; rather than being a mere drudge, she held an elevated position which is difficult for us to imagine. In terms of blood money (paid, by custom, to prevent the taking of blood revenge), a woman was worth twice as much as a man: when the family of a killer was required to make formal payment to the family of the victim, Indian law determined that the sum be doubled if the slain were a woman. The Indian woman held a more privileged and equal position in her society than women do in any European or American community today. In terms of normal human compensation, her status was proportionate to her responsibility and her labor. Many white women who had been taken captive in warfare and who had become members of Indian communities refused to be ransomed; they would not return to the drudgery and subordination accorded women in colonial society.

In the primitive economy of our Indians, farming was the major and most important food source. Indians with hoe agriculture built up no great surplus, and it was the men's responsibility to supplement the vegetable foods with a fairly constant supply of meat. In times of crisis when crops were inadequate or when stored foods were destroyed by accident or warfare, the survival of the community depended en-

tirely upon the success of the hunter. The game of the countryside could not support the people adequately, or for long, but it was their only salvation in times of famine. Such times of near-starvation must have been frequent; every Indian hunter thought in terms of them, and of his game as essential to the survival of his group. "We must hunt to feed our children" was the Indian's explanation for his tremendous efforts in the chase. The Indian of the eastern woodlands was not hunting in virgin country, but in woodlands which had been coursed by expert hunters for ten thousand years. The game supply was in some sort of balance with the hunting population, and the hunter could only take his quarry through patience, skill, and great effort. In a culture where hunting is not a sport but a necessary source of food, women are useless as hunters and men cannot be spared to work with a hoe. Hunting and warfare were men's twin activities, and in both there could be no hesitation, no avoidance of hazard, for the whole community lived too close to disaster.

Women's particular roles had religious significance. The responsibilities of garden and hearth were delegated to women by the Creator; the crops were a gift to women from the supernaturals in return for labor and proper conduct in life. The agricultural activities of women, and of deities concerned with agriculture, were central themes in Indian ritual. In the same way, men's activities and the supernatural world of the hunter held a central place in religious ideology. Game animals were gifts of the Creator and of lesser supernaturals to the hunter, provided the hunter did his work properly and well and conducted his affairs in a precisely correct fashion. This involved matters of conservation, ritual, and taboo. Some of the greatest differences between Indian and white hunting practices are revealed by examining the Indian's religious attitude toward hunting activities and toward game animals. The white man regarded game animals as meat from which to supply his needs, as mere objects to be taken. The Indian considered the animal as an intelligent, conscious fellow member of the same spiritual kingdom. His own destiny was linked with that of the animals by the Creator, and he felt that both he and his victim understood the roles which they played in the hunt—the animal, in other words, was resigned to its fate.

PART II. THE WORLD VIEW OF THE INDIAN HUNTER

THE KEEPER OF GAME

Beside the animals and animal spirits—actually animal ghosts—the hunter recognized the existence, in the woods about him, of supernaturals who had even greater powers. Most important of these in some areas, including eastern Pennsylvania, was the Keeper of Game, a half-human-, half-animal-formed supernatural who controlled the availability of game to the hunters. It was he who thwarted the hunter who had not conducted himself properly, and who saw to it that there was game for the good hunter. The Keeper of Game lived in the forests with his herds and appears sometimes as half deer, sometimes as half bear. He led and protected the game and sent forth the animals which were the hunter's quota. But he could bring death to the evildoer by a carefully prepared "accident." Sometimes he is confused with the bear, especially with a mythical supernatural bear called the great naked bear or the lean white bear, who survives in white trappers' folklore as the "ranger." This mystic animal was a terrible omen to Indians in most of the Northeast.

In no sense, however, were the supernaturals and the spirit beings more remote or less real to the Indian than the people or the animals about him. He made no sharp distinction between the physical and the spiritual worlds; he could feel the presence of the supernatural behind every phenomenon of nature. Mother Earth, the Corn Mother, the Keeper of Game, the Thunderer, and the wood spirits, whom we know as the Mask Spirits, were not gods or deities in quite the same sense as we ordinarily use the terms, but might instead be described as superhuman beings. The Creator and his twin brother, the devious Creator of evil things and of concealed blessings, were what we would more likely call the deities. They had created and they ruled the whole world with its graded series of lesser creatures. The Creators, the Keeper of Game, men, and animals differed in degree rather than kind. They differed, not as between the natural and the supernatural, but in their degrees of authority, spiritual power, and knowledge, all of which had been determined at the time of creation by the twin creators. Man, therefore, held a certain rank in a graded hierarchy of beings, all equally real to the Indian. Man held no feudal lordship over animals, nor did the supernaturals hold vassalage over him; rather, he held a reciprocating, mutually beneficial relationship with each level of being.

THE TWO CREATORS

The Creator and his devious brother—called by many names, among them “flint,” “warty,” and “the devious one”—were sometimes identified with the east and west winds. Our forefathers identified them with God and the Devil and taught the Indians to do so, although the resemblances were remote. To the Indian, they represented philosophic principles of direct and of deviously indirect action, of straightforward and of upside-down methods of accomplishing ends. The Creator was open and constructive, one whose good motives were always obvious. The devious brother was the perverse creator, who always accomplished his ends by the most indirect methods, who accomplished one result while appearing to do exactly the opposite. The Indian saw the curious world in which we live as the handicraft of both twins, as the result of clear intention and of paradox working together as creative principles. The Creator made game animals, so his brother made carnivores to attack them; the Creator made edible plants, so his brother made briars and poisonous plants; the Creator made day, while night became his brother’s domain. Neither one, by himself, could have created a world that would function, but the two together, in their competition, created the universe. The Creator was responsible for obvious good, his brother for all the bad features of the world, most of which also included concealed blessings. The devious Creator was not unfriendly to man, nor was he a destroyer or a hunter of men, but he represented a basic theme, paradox, which both the Indian and the white man recognize everywhere in the world.

THE MASK SPIRITS

The universe ruled by these twins was seen as a series of horizontal layers, seven or twelve in number. Man’s level, generally thought of as the third layer from the bottom, was ruled largely by man. A few beings of this realm, such as the Keeper of Game and the Mask Spirits, were thought of as man’s equals, though sometimes possessing greater spiritual power. These, significantly, were beings of the forests rather than of the cultivated land. The Mask Spirits, best known to us from modern Iroquois sources, were spirits of the woods and perhaps of the winds, whose ancestors had been banished to the wilderness by the Creator. Some Indians today claim that they once lived in human communities. They are called “grandfathers,” and they are poor cripples, who live in the woods and do no farming. They crave tobacco, which they must beg from humans, and in turn they

undertake to cure certain diseases through masked impersonators who represent them, and to keep other evils away from mankind. Hunters frequently hear them in the woods and sometimes meet them face to face; I have several times heard eyewitness descriptions of them. They are not thought to control the game or the hunter's fortune, but the hunter pursues his business in their domain and must be friendly and just to them, lest they bring him disaster, "break his speech" and make him stammer, or bring death through psychosis. The Indian seems to regard them as nearly man's equal.

THE DWARFS

The most numerous man-like beings of the wilderness were, and still are, however, the dwarfs, who were, and are, always about. In the natural order they are thought of as nearly man's equal, having greater power and knowledge in some matters, and less in others. They live entirely by hunting, and their skill and stamina as woodsmen



State Historical Society of Wisconsin

Cree Indians hunting beaver raid a beaver house in midwinter. This water color and two others in this booklet depicting Cree Indians on the hunt are attributed to Peter Rindesbacher (1806-1834), painter of Indians, animals, and landscapes.

surpass that of any human. They are essentially the rulers of wilderness areas, which they share as hunting ground with the Indian, and are precisely like Indians in all details except size. They have their own communities in the rock slides and on the high mountain cliffs, where they hold their own ritual cycle and carry on their social and political life much as do humans. They sometimes appear as twins, brother and sister. The dwarfs are sometimes confused with the Keeper of Game in Indian stories. The Delaware Indians believe that the little people hunt with the bow and eat only the hearts of the game, while the Seneca and Cayuga insist that they hunt only with the sling, and hence they sometimes call them "stone-rollers." The ordinary Delaware name for them is "they eat hearts." In some Indian communities it is believed that the black squirrel is the only game they hunt, and that this animal is reserved for them. Indians everywhere consider the little people very important neighbors; like the Mask Spirits, they are so important a part of reservation lore that one never hears about them unless he brings them up in conversation. The average Indian assumes that Indians are not alone in such beliefs. There is no surer way to offend an Indian than to express amusement at his quaint concept of the dwarf. He believes that such irreverent expression is as offensive to these little people as any verbal or overt insult, and may incur their wrath and vengeance. The personal affront felt by an Indian when he has exposed his beliefs to ridicule is only partly a matter of chagrin and hurt pride. More essentially, he considers it a practical matter, for he has exposed both himself and a stranger to vengeance from the spirit world, from the dwarfs, or from the Mask Spirits, or even from the deer or bear themselves if they be involved as the butt of such ridicule. The Indian's sensitivity to the possibility of retaliation and his experience that most strangers are bores who will make light of his most cherished beliefs are the main reasons why it is so difficult to get any deep understanding of his essential way of life and his religious system from modern conservative Indian communities. Life among such retiring people goes on much as it always has. The old systems are kept as faithfully as any zealot holds his creed, but none of it lies on the surface or is exposed to unsympathetic eyes.

The dwarfs are so commonplace, so well known, and so ever present that they are considered obvious. More than once I have had an Indian express surprise that I did not know of some detail about them. I have heard a number of descriptions of them from people who believed they had seen them, some of the descriptions being extremely

detailed and precise. One aged Tuscarora described in detail the tailoring of their green clothing; he was impressed by their solemn, kindly appearance when he met a pair while hunting as a young man. They are generally friendly to man, although they can be vicious enemies to the malefactor. Sometimes they care for children lost in the woods, feeding and sheltering them until they can return to their families; such individuals are under a strict injunction to say little about their experiences. Dwarfs sometimes guide or help the lost hunter and may sometimes aid in the taking of game. In some areas, Indian hunters know spoken charms or invocations which are intended to gain the dwarfs' assistance, and in some cases dwarfs have given knowledge of a medicinal or food plant.

Dwarf belief was once an important matter in Europe, too, although only the merest vestige of this remains in our fairy tales. The Indian dwarfs are anything but fairy tale people and are still considered real and very important neighbors to humans. Unlike the European dwarfs, the Indian dwarfs do not exact vengeance by violence, but are magicians with greater supernatural powers than humans in their own realm. The dwarf of the Swiss Alps was believed to push the evil chamois-hunter off a cliff. If, however, the little people of the American Indian are offended by a man, they may ruin his luck in the hunt, drive the game away from him, and plague him with practical jokes. If seriously offended, they may conjure up diseases for him. Worst, they may "take away his mind." The hunter who had given the little people deep injury would not return to his home, but would be found wandering in the woods with a vacant stare and with no memory or intelligible speech, eating grass and bereft of all mentality. If he were found and led back before he starved, he became a village idiot, without intelligence or motivation, a harmless sort of animal. Consequently, the Indians never entered the high mountain areas where the dwarfs had their towns, for to trespass on the rocky peaks would be an invitation to what the Indians considered the theft of mentality by the dwarfs. Sometimes Indians mention other creatures who live in the mountain fastness, including strange lean dwarfs with knifelike faces, almost two dimensional in appearance, and one-eyed human-like beings.

THE DARK DANCE

Among the Longhouse Seneca, Cayuga, and Onondaga, the people who hold to their aboriginal faith, one particular ritual, the Dark Dance, is specifically dedicated to the little people and their asso-

ciates, the animal spirits. The Dark Dance is held in the house at night, at the time of the first killing frosts in autumn, and marks the beginning of the winter season; the songs are sometimes said to bring winter. The Dark Dance songs are, to my ear, the most beautiful in local Indian music. The ritual is held in the dark, with the doors and windows open, and a lighted lantern is placed in the dooryard or on the porch as a signal to the beings who are invited to the ritual. A single male singer carries the burden of the four-hour-long song, with an antiphonal female chorus. At intervals during the song the women dance. The people are seated in a circle, and a roasted pig's head on a skewer is passed around and eaten during the ritual. The head is not touched but is held by the skewer, and one bites pieces off with one's teeth. The dwarfs and the animal spirits are believed to share in this ritual feast and to eat with the people as the head is passed around. The pig is probably a substitute for the bear which was once eaten at rituals.

The earlier verses of the Dark Dance songs are elaborate, poetic invitations sung to the dwarfs to come forth from their various places of abode in the wilderness and feast with the people. Most of the Dark Dance consists of invitations to various animal spirits and to the animals themselves to come and partake of the feast with the people. As the leader sings to one and another of these animals, the men in chorus imitate the call of the animal or bird. This ritual follows by less than a month the last of the rites dedicated to agriculture, the harvest festival. It marks a major change in the Indian calendar and begins the major hunting and trapping season. The major purpose of the ritual is apparently the placation of the spirits of game animals, and its place in the calendar indicates that it was a prelude to the most critical part of the year for the Indian huntsman.

THE LITTLE WATER MEDICINE

Within the group of people who stage the Dark Dance for the community (the so-called Dark Dance Society), there is often, on Iroquois reservations, a smaller and more select group which cares for and administers a very important gift from the animal world. Its members form the so-called Little Water Medicine Society, which must be responsible for what is something like a national treasure, the little water medicine. This material is reputed to cure broken bones and serious wounds, and non-Indians living near reservations at times seek treatment with this potion. It is said to have been made up of the



Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society

The beasts of the forest revive the body of the Good Hunter, as drawn by Jesse Cornplanter, of Towanda Reservation, New York, in 1908. The drawing is reproduced from *Seneca Myths and Folk Tales*, by Arthur C. Parker (Buffalo, 1923).

nerves of all the animals and the hearts of all the birds, mixed with several legendary magical plants. It was given to an Indian by the birds and animals and cannot be replaced when exhausted; hence a dose of it is the most minute quantity possible. It is an extremely dangerous material if handled improperly, since it contains the vital essence of the whole zoological kingdom, and special feasts and rituals must be held for it at specified times by its custodians. If any bundles of the medicine are overlooked or neglected, they are heard singing the songs of the proper ritual to warn the people of impending catastrophe unless the proper observances are carried out.

There has been for some years a firm belief among the people at Coldspring Longhouse on the Allegany Reservation in southwest New York state that someone had sold a bundle of the medicine to a white man, and that several mysterious deaths and other disasters on the reservation were a result of the neglect of this bundle by its white owner. In 1949, while sorting collections in the Pennsylvania State

Museum, I actually found this package of the Little Water Medicine, collected by an ethnologist at the Allegany Reservation in 1925. The ethnologist had died of a broken neck a year later, and the Indian seller is reported to have wasted away and died in great torment. I hastened to return it to its rightful owners, who were somewhat relieved to see that I had wrapped it in the proper white cloth for transportation, and assured me that my good faith was sufficient protection against injury from the medicine. The custodians immediately held the proper feast and ritual for this long-neglected part of their most important ritual substance.

According to the origin story of the Little Water Medicine Society, the medicine was a gift to the Good Hunter, who typified all of the huntsman's virtues, and was thus rewarded. An almost identical origin story is told in connection with several other Iroquois medicine societies, and the tale is a very important part of Indian tradition. The Good Hunter was an exemplary Indian male who lived the ideal of the hunter. He killed only when he needed food and always left the entrails of his game for the carnivores of the forest. He always left some of his food at his camps for the animals. He was kindly, soft-spoken, and patient. Because of this the animals considered him a friend and came gladly to his bag. However, during the Cherokee War (in the mid-eighteenth century), he was ambushed, killed, and scalped by a Cherokee war party. The animals, finding his body in the woods, gathered to decide what they might do. The scalp had first to be recovered, and the crow accomplished this. Then the beasts set out to make a medicine to revive him. They all contributed from their most vital parts, the seat of their souls or their vital essences—the birds from their hearts, the animals from their sinews (nerves). The Good Hunter was revived with the potion, but his scalp had been tanned and stiffened and it could not be fitted or attached to his head. They called the Great Dew Eagle, a supernatural bird who carries a pond of dew on his back and sprinkles it as a reviving medicine on the earth during the night. He sprinkled some of his dew on the scalp, which became relaxed and alive and was replaced on the head of their friend.

When the Good Hunter was cured and ready to return home, the beasts gave him the residue of the medicine and told him how to use it. They also told him how it must be fed and cared for by periodic rituals, lest it bring death instead of good, and they taught him the songs and the procedure for the medicine societies' feasts. As with many other Iroquois medicine societies, initiation is only by treat-



State Historical Society of Wisconsin

A Cree Indian hunts duck, about 1820. This painting is attributed to Peter Rindesbacher.

ment, and one becomes a votary through being cured by the medicine. The numerous accounts of their own cures by this potion, as told me by members of the society, testify to the very high regard in which the hunter's medicine is held, and to the complete faith which these people have in its properties. This sacred material is, of course, an important part of the hunter's tradition, and its custodians perpetuate the ideal behavior exemplified by the legendary Good Hunter.

Some may feel that an extended discussion of the supernaturalism, religious beliefs, and thought of the Indian hunter is unnecessary, but I think these are more important to our knowledge of our Indian predecessors than are the details of hunting procedure. Both complexes, of belief and of technique, have almost completely disappeared, except in a few areas, and it is now very difficult to get full information on either from living peoples. The fanciful and alien concepts involved in Indian lore make full understanding even more difficult.

PART III. INDIAN HUNTING AND TRAPPING

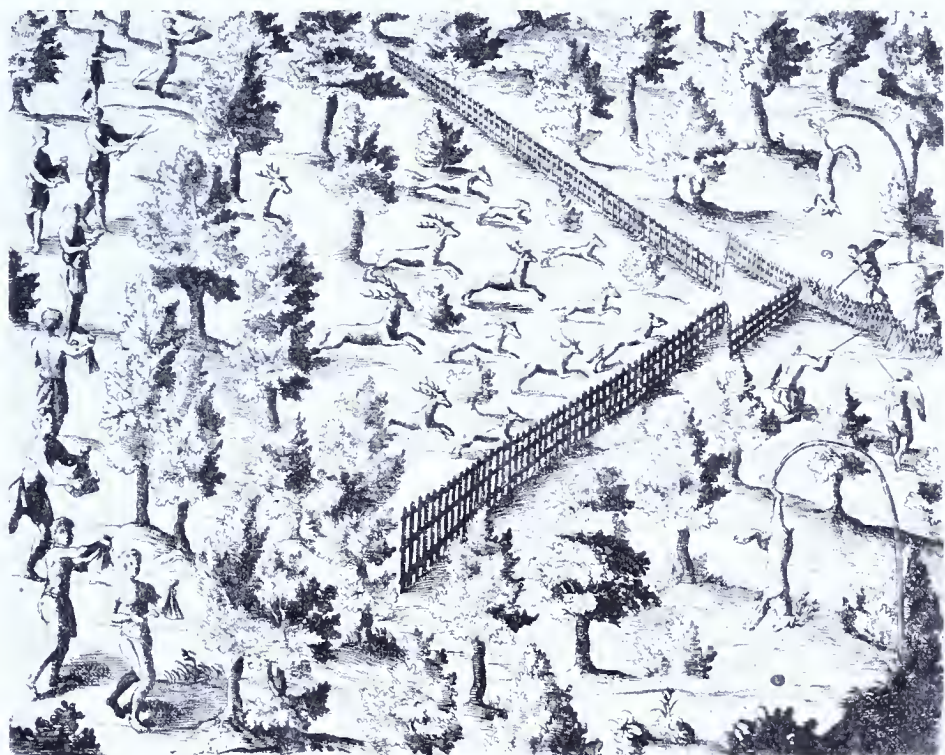
DEER

The animal of most value to the Indians of the East was the white-tailed deer. The bones of deer are more numerous in Pennsylvania Indian sites than those of all the other animals together. That early-day deer herd was the Indians' most important single source of meat, and was a source of hides for clothing, of antler and bone for tools, of sinew and gut for bindings, and of glue. The meat was roasted, or it was cooked into stew, while the bones and scrap were cooked into soup stock. Even the partially digested contents of the deer stomach and intestines were sometimes eaten. This may seem revolting to us, but, actually, such contents made a concentrated vegetable food of great nutritive value. Among many Indians it was used as a special diet for people who had been found starving—served as a thin broth, it was the only food which would not make them violently ill. As with most other animals, the brain and many of the internal organs were also eaten, so that practically nothing from the carcass was wasted.

Deer were taken by still-hunting and stalking, by driving, and by snares. Individual hunting was most common and was extremely arduous; the hunter often ranged for several days with almost no food while he attempted to ambush the deer on their trails, to stalk them while feeding, or to surprise them in their beds at dawn. The deer-bleat, a type of animal calling device, was used at times to lure deer by imitating the sound of a lost fawn. When deer were abundant within a small area, they were driven to their fate. A party of men surrounded and closed in on them, driving the deer into a natural or artificial bottleneck to be killed by a smaller group of hunters. Champlain's drawing of the deer drive (1608) shows the drivers pounding deer shoulder blades with thighbones to frighten them. Generally, however, there were too few deer for a deer-drive to become a frequent affair. Therefore, deer traps were frequently used. Springpole snares, made by pegging down the bottom of a large noose in a game-trail and attaching the other end of the rope to a bent-over sapling, were the most common traps. A deer walking into such a snare got the noose around his antlers, neck, or belly and pulled it off the pegs, the release of the bent sapling tightening the noose and tethering the animal. To be effective, such a snare did not have to lift a deer off the ground, but merely had to keep enough tension on the noose so that the deer could neither roll nor scrape it off, and had to partially

counterbalance the animal's weight. When our pilgrim fathers landed in Massachusetts, one of the first things they did was to blunder into a group of such deer snares and get several of their members dragged off the ground, no doubt to the great amusement of the Indians.

Elk were by no means as common as deer, but we find more of their bones in Indian sites in all parts of Pennsylvania than we would expect. Elk were especially numerous in the northern part and on the West Branch Valley of the Susquehanna. Although we know little about elk hunting, these huge animals seem to have been stalked generally by lone hunters. Although there is a great deal of folklore about bison in Pennsylvania, up to the present time no piece of bison bone has been found in an Indian site in the State. It seems apparent that, regardless of the abundance of local tradition about bison, it was, to say the least, a rare animal in aboriginal Pennsylvania, probably too rare to be of any practical significance to the Indian. Moose, needless to say, are unknown from Pennsylvania Indian sites.



The John Carter Brown Library, Brown University

This engraving of a great Indian deer hunt in the Northeast was published by Samuel de Champlain in 1632. From the left Indians using noisemakers drive deer into a bottleneck where they are killed. On the right two animals have been caught by Indian snares.



State Historical Society of Wisconsin

Cree Indians traveling along a winter trap line. This painting is attributed to Peter Rindesbacher.

If the deer was the most valuable animal to the Indian economy, the bear was the most respected and admired. The bear is unlike any other local mammal in his general human-like appearance and in his speed, grace, and silence in the woods. In many places one finds Indians who will not eat bear meat, and who ask, "How can you eat a bear? Have you ever seen one skinned out? It looks exactly like a man." Such people, one sometimes discovers, have a family tradition of descent from a bear or from a bear foster child. The tales which reflect these traditions, one of the bear husband and the other of the lost child adopted by bears, are heard among Indians throughout most of the United States and Canada.

BEAR

The version outlined here of the bear husband tale is the Cherokee origin story of the Bear Dance: The bear husband was a man who while hunting bears wounded a female, and was badly injured himself in an accident. The bears found him and nursed him back to

health. During his long stay among them, he learned their language and ways, and he came to look like a bear himself. Eventually he married the she-bear whom he had wounded. At a later date he or a descendant identified himself to humans and taught them certain details of ritual, herb medicine, and woods lore.

The adopted bear boy story is even more common and tells of the lost child who was sheltered and fed by bears. Later the bears were killed by hunters, and the child was saved. The people learned most of what they knew of bear lore from him, so the story goes, and so his descendants refused to hunt or eat bear. Bear meat was the most important ritual food, almost a sacrament, and the bear was involved in elaborate patterns of ritual observance too complex to discuss here.

In Pennsylvania, Indians spoke of the bear as "my uncle" (father's brother) and generally believed that the bears were engaged in a very gentlemanly war-game with humans, under rules laid down by the Creator. Another common belief was that the bear came willingly as a ritual food to the hunter who called him, and that the bear's spiritual immortality protected him from any serious injury at the hands of humans. Of all the animals about him, the Indian placed the bear in a special category as a near-human and as a close relative. The belief in the human-like quality of bears was so strong that only strong religious motives allowed the Indian to hunt bear. The bear was both still-hunted and killed while in hibernation during the mid-winter. In the archeological sites, bear bones are, next to deer, the most abundant of the large mammals; we find the remains of one bear for every hundred or so deer in the excavation of Indian village sites.

SMALL ANIMALS AND BIRDS

Almost all of the other local mammals are represented in the garbage-bone from Indian sites, and we assume that most of these, such as raccoon, opossum, skunk, fox, squirrel, groundhog, chipmunk, mouse, and shrew, were trapline meat, cooked in a soup kettle along with the turtles, frogs, and other minor animals. A few other animals eaten by Indians, including wolf, bobcat, and panther, must have been taken with the bow, however. Beaver and muskrat were sometimes trapped, but generally Indians caught them by breaking into their lodges in the winter. A hole was cut in the ice over the entry to the beaver lodge, and then rods were driven in the lodge to drive the beaver out. As they swam out of the entry, they were speared. Many of the harpoon-shaped antler and bone points which we find in Indian



The John Carter Brown Library, Brown University

The killing of migratory birds by Indians is depicted in an engraving published in 1664 in *Historiae Canadensis*, by the Jesuit Francois de Creux.

sites were probably beaver spears. To take muskrat, a day was selected when the ice was very thin so that the fleeing animals could be seen and speared without a hole being cut. As alternative means of taking beaver, the entry to the lodge was blocked and the lodge torn open, or the beaver dam was torn down and the pond drained, leaving the animals easy prey. Needless to say, Indians today are extremely reluctant to admit any knowledge of this illegal and obsolete procedure, but it was once the ordinary manner of taking beaver. The beaver was probably of greatest importance to Indians as a fur for clothing and robes, but its meat was everywhere relished, and the tails, cooked separately in grease, were a great Indian delicacy. During the early colonial period, the scent glands and furs of the beaver were the most valuable articles in the Indian trade and were in fact almost the whole basis of the fur trade. These scent glands or castors were the source of musk used in perfume and were once a very valuable commodity. Indians everywhere, as do the rest of us, invariably mistake the castors for the testes of the beaver.

All kinds of birds were eaten, judging by modern Indian practice and by the evidence from ancient village sites, but we find relatively few of the smaller birds of passage represented in the archeological sites. The wild turkey was the most important game bird everywhere, with the ducks and geese and the chicken-like birds, grouse and woodcock, much less abundant in the garbage-bone samples. Passenger pigeon bones are found infrequently in Indian sites, suggesting that this bird was less abundant in aboriginal times than in the nineteenth century, or that breeding roosts were far from Indian settlements. Almost any local bird can be found represented in the excavated material, however. Many of these were probably trapped and snared by children; small birds were especially important as food supplements in famine times, when the whole community collected small birds to eat.

HUNTING WEAPONS AND TRAPS

The blowgun was also used to hunt birds, squirrels, and rabbits in Pennsylvania, western New York, and areas to the south. This hunter's tool is generally thought of as South American, but it was a common implement throughout much of the East. Grouse and similar birds, as well as rabbits, were generally hunted with special arrows which had a special broad, blunt, heavy tip. Such arrows would crush and kill such delicate animals without mutilating them, whereas a pointed arrow would pass through and allow a mortally wounded animal to escape.

Turkeys were taken with the bow and by trapping. In both cases, Indian techniques took advantage of two notable characteristics of the wild turkey, its keen eyesight and its extreme stupidity. Turkeys were lured to the concealed hunter by turkey calls—a great variety of gadgets for imitating the sound was used. A turkey will not come within range of a hunter he can see, however, so the hunter sometimes disguised his head with a deer-head or a wildcat mask made from the face of a bobcat, permitting him to watch his quarry without his exposed head giving him away. Trapping was probably the most usual way of taking turkey. The great variety of turkey traps used included some which could fool no one but a turkey.

The elaborate mechanical skill of Indian traps and the vast lore about their use include too great a bulk of data to relate here. Indians did, however, make expert use of a great variety of trap types, many of them exceedingly complex. In recent years, with the decline of trapping, most of these types have passed out of use and are all but forgotten. Most of the Indian traps still in use have a trigger mechanism, borrowed from the whites, which replaces the older mechanisms, so that the figure-four trigger is now used on most Indian snares, deadfalls, and cage traps in the Northeast. Besides traps, the major implements of the Indian hunter during late prehistoric and early colonial times were the bow, the beaver-spear, the blowgun, the fish-hook, and the fish-spear. Rabbits were also sometimes killed with clubs. Indian fishing, omitted from discussion here, was an elaborate business involving fish traps, pounds, and fish poisons more than lines or fish-gigs.

RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE

Every aspect of Indian hunting was closely involved with ritual and religious concepts, as indeed was the whole life of the Indian; if ritual and religion appear to some to have been overemphasized here, it is because they seem so basic in the relationship of man to nature. Ritual and religious practice assured the Indian of protection against the ghost or spirit of the creature he killed, and also determined the patterns which he followed in hunting and warfare.

One interesting object, the pack-strap or burden-strap, appears important in this connection. This was a long woven belt of soft fiber, which had a broad central part which was held against the forehead or across the shoulders while the ends were tied about a heavy load carried on the shoulders. One major use of the pack-strap was in carrying home game from the forest. It is a great tribute to the hardi-

ness and strength of these men that they could pack a whole deer carcass for miles on their backs.

In the ritualized procedures of Indian hunting, decorated pack-straps were considered a necessary binding for the body of an animal, even where the carcass was not carried by the strap. In certain areas we have some data to show that this pack-strap was both a magical and spiritual binding to overcome the animal's ability to retaliate, and a decorative binding intended to please and flatter the spirit of the dead animal. The strap became a symbol of the possession and control of the game animal by the hunter.

However, in warfare the captive of war was brought home by his enemies, tied and led by the same pack-strap, the symbol of possession and control of a corpse. In other ways the captive was in somewhat the situation of the captured animal, and his captors surrounded him with ritual forms which prevented his spiritual retaliation, exactly as with deer and bear. It was not so much that warfare was conducted by hunting patterns, as that hunting was a sort of ritualized warfare, carried on under strong religious sanctions. Since the Indian sensed powerful spiritual agents everywhere in the world about him, he was only able to do violence to animals or men when his ritual forms and religious tenets permitted this and insured him against retaliation from the supernatural world.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I should like to emphasize that this sketch of the mind and manners of the Indian hunter is a reconstruction, synthesized from information drawn from many sources and from different peoples of the area. Where, for example, Delaware and Seneca information has been drawn together into one discussion, or where our knowledge of New England or Carolina peoples has been drawn in to fill out details, we are dealing with ways of life that were common to most peoples of the general region, rather than with purely local patterns. The way of life described here has been long extinct in our area, and can only be characterized by using every surviving fragment and every clue we can obtain.

It should also be understood that the picture here presented pertains to late prehistoric and early colonial times. Ancient ancestors of our Indians lived in a different fashion, judging by our knowledge gained from archeology. Indian ways of life changed very rapidly in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries on the white frontier.



